

In this month's newsletter:

Loneliness and
Isolation

Mindfulness

Three ways to reduce loneliness this Christmas

With friends and family coming together, sharing meals, exchanging gifts, and creating lifelong memories, the festive season is typically regarded as a time of joy, togetherness, and celebration. However, for many people, this time of year can heighten feelings of loneliness and isolation.

According to the latest [Health Survey for England](#), 22% of people feel lonely at least some of the time, and 6% often or always feel lonely.

Loneliness can be experienced differently from person to person, it's not just about being physically alone; it's about feeling unsupported and disconnected from others. Isolation and loneliness can have a significant negative impact on a person's mental and emotional wellbeing.

The pressure to conform to societal expectations during the festive season can end up intensifying the loneliness people feel, and festive reminders, such as songs and decorations, may trigger people emotionally.

To help to combat loneliness and isolation during this time of the year, we've put together a list of tried and tested positive coping strategies for accessing support and finding connection.

1. Reaching out to others: Taking the initiative to reach out to others may seem a little daunting, but it can really help to reduce feelings of loneliness. You can reach out to family and friends, or if you feel that you can't there are also lots of amazing online communities you can connect with such as [Sofa Singers](#), [Meetup](#), and [online book club](#). There are also online communities run by charities, such as [Macmillan's Online Community](#), [Side by Side by Mind](#), and [Scope's forum](#). Or if you are looking for a great way to meet others in person whilst keeping active, [Parkrun](#) is a great option for fostering local connections.



2. Volunteering: Giving your time to charity during the festive period can provide you with a sense of purpose and fulfilment. You can connect with like-minded individuals and make a positive impact on society by volunteering at a local shelter or community organisation. There are plenty of organisations that offer excellent volunteering pro-grammes such as [Do-It](#), the [Salvation Army](#), and the [NHS](#).



3. Self-care: Although you may not feel like it, taking care of yourself is crucial during challenging times. Try to prioritise things such as regular physical activity, eating a healthy balanced diet, and sticking to a sleep schedule to support your mental and physical health and wellbeing. You can also help to manage your symptoms by engaging in activities that bring you joy and relaxation such as listening to music, reading, painting, or practicing mindfulness. Remember to be kind to yourself, and take things at your own pace.



If you are reading this and are fortunate enough to have a circle of loved ones around you, it's important to be mindful of those who may be experiencing loneliness. Extending an invitation, making a phone call, or checking in on a neighbour can make a world of difference to someone who is feeling isolated.

Refocus the mind: a mindful breathing exercise

As we approach the end of the year, and a new year is just on the horizon, we often find ourselves taking the time to reset our minds. A great way to practice this is through mindfulness, as it involves focusing your attention to what is going on inside and outside yourself.

It can be easy to stop noticing the world around you and to live in your own head, caught up in thoughts without taking the time to notice how they have been driving your behaviour and emotions.

Try out this mindful breathing exercise to refocus your mind and ground yourself in the present moment.

- 1)** Begin by getting yourself into a comfortable position and allow your eyes to close gently, or if you would prefer you can keep them open with a soft gaze.
- 2)** Start by taking several long deep breaths, breathing in fully and then exhaling fully. Breathe in from the nose and out from the mouth, allow your breath to find its own natural rhythm.
- 3)** Bring your full attention to noticing each breath in as it enters your nostrils, travels down your lungs and causes your belly to expand, and notice each out as your belly contracts and the air moves back up through the lungs and out through your mouth.
- 4)** Invite your full attention to flow with your breath. Notice how the inhale is different from the exhale, you may experience the air as cool as it enters your nose but warm as you exhale through the mouth.
- 5)** As you turn more deeply inwards, begin to let go of noises around you. If you do become distracted by sounds in the room or outside, simply notice them and then bring your attention back to the breath.
- 6)** Simply breathe as you would normally, not trying to change anything about your breath, just noticing, do not try to control your breath in anyway.
- 7)** If your mind wanders to thoughts, plans, or problems, simply notice that your mind is wandering and again bring your attention back to the breath. Watch your thought, as it enters your awareness, as neutrally as possible.
- 8)** Practice letting go of that thought as if it were a leaf floating down from a tree. In your mind place each thought that arises on that leaf and watch as it floats slowly out of sight, then turn your attention back to the breathing. Your breath is an anchor you can return to over and over again. When you become distracted by a thought, notice that your mind is wandering and take note of the types of thoughts that distract you. Noticing is the richest part of learning.
- 9)** Come home to the breath with your full attention, each time watching and feeling the gentle rise of your stomach on the in-breath and then relaxing and letting go on the out breath. You may become distracted by pain or discomfort in the body. You may notice feelings arising, perhaps sadness or happiness, frustration or contentment. Acknowledge where the mind went, without judging or pushing anything away. Simply refocus your mind and guide your attention back to the breath.
- 10)** As this practice comes to an end, slowly allow your attention to expand and notice your entire body and then beyond your body to the room you are in. Let those sounds back in, those sensations, those feelings, and when you are ready, open your eyes and come back, fully alert and awake. The breath is always with you as a refocusing tool to bring you back to the present moment. Set your intention and use this practice throughout your day to help cultivate and strengthen your attention.

If you found this mindfulness exercise helpful, or are looking for other ways to practice mindfulness, you can visit the [MIND website](https://www.mind.org.uk).